
SUMMARY STATEMENT
CDC Funding Opportunity Announcement CDC-RFA-CI10-1009
EPIDEMIOLOGY AND LABORATORY CAPACITY FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES (ELC)
OutbreakNet Sentinel Sites (OSS) – Enhancing Detection, Investigation, and
Control of Foodborne Disease Outbreaks

Date of Review: August 12, 2010
Applicant Name: Massachussets
Principal Investigator: Alfred DeMaria
Amount Requested: \$599,991

Recommendation: Approve
Score: 82.7

Summary of Proposal:

The applicant provided an acceptable proposal to maintain the work already being done by an established multijurisdictional working group and to improve the speed, coordination, centralization and standardization of foodborne illness/outbreak surveillance and response. The proposal included the following activities

- Facilitate rapid transport specimens to the public health laboratory.
- Implementation of a centralized approach for case interviews through the use of student interns and other additional staff
- Improve rapid environmental assessments via additional staff
- Provision of additional trainings regarding foodborne outbreak investigations
- Improve turnaround time for pathogen isolation and identification via additional staff
- Provide or facilitate norovirus and parasitology isolation and identification services
- Expand current electronic methods for data collection, data sharing and response activities.

General Comments:

The applicant provided a comprehensive proposal that was well supported and provided strong justification for needs and proposed methodologies to address identified gaps. The applicant described a well-established, multijurisdictional working group, surveillance systems that communicate electronically, and sufficient epidemiology and laboratory capacity.

Recommendations:

The proposal is recommended for approval with funding dependent on resource availability.

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Objective Review Criteria

For each criterion, provide comments regarding the strengths and/or weaknesses for **each** proposed Activity. Please use bullets and reference your comments with page numbers whenever possible. Numeric scores (1 score for each criterion) should be placed on the first page of the evaluation form.

- A) Operational Plan (45 Points):** Does the applicant propose clear operational plan(s) for each of the three main areas (public health laboratory surveillance, epidemiological interviews and investigations, and environmental health assessments) targeted with this funding opportunity? How many activities under each core area are addressed? Does the applicant provide clear reasons for not addressing any activities (i.e., is a requested activity prohibited by state law)? Is the proposed plan complete, comprehensive, and adequate to carry out the proposed objectives? Does the plan clearly describe how the applicant will work with other projects and federal partners or programs funded by federal partners (e.g., FoodNet, FDA Food Protection Rapid Response Teams)? Specific questions to consider include:
- 1. Enhancement of public health laboratory surveillance?** *(See page 24 of FOA for specific criteria/questions for this core area)* **(20 Points)**
 - 2. Epidemiological interviews and investigations?** *(See page 25 of FOA for specific criteria/questions for this core area)* **(20 points)**
 - 3. Environmental health assessment?** *(See page 26 of FOA for specific criteria/questions for this core area)* **(5 points)**

Strengths:

The applicant adequately addressed core laboratory activities. The applicant proposed laboratory improvements via

- Identification of critical steps in specimen submission that delay receipt to provide advice for improvement.
- Decreased turnaround time for the serotyping and PFGE subtyping
- Distribution of specimen collection “kits” to outbreak cases
- Partnership with an existing laboratory program for testing parasitic samples, hepatitis A testing, and re-establishing a norovirus testing program

The applicant adequately addressed core epidemiological interview and investigation activities. The applicant proposed epidemiological interview and investigation improvements via

- Conducting rapid case interviews using a standard form without waiting for subtyping results.
- Establish a student interview team approach to centralized interviews of cases under aggressive timelines and on evenings and weekends
- Collaborate with outside partners

The applicant adequately addressed core environmental health activities.

Weaknesses:

The narrative and detailed description of the operational plan addressed all requirements but was generally vague and would have been strengthened with the inclusion of

- Additional details regarding the enhancement of sharing of PulseNet information with epidemiology staff.
- Additional justification for the timeline for the environmental health assessment protocol development (18 months)
- Additional details describing what staff would be responsible for specific activities
- Additional details for types of proposed trainings
- Additional details for goals/plans for completeness of interviews

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B) Capacity (20 Points): Does the plan fully describe existing resources to conduct foodborne outbreak surveillance, to include capacity funded under mechanisms other than direct state or local funding? Does the applicant clearly demonstrate that they have the necessary capacities to successfully implement the project and accomplish the program goals? Do they demonstrate capacity for rapid initiation of activities and timely completing of the project? Does the applicant demonstrate capacity working with other jurisdictions and/or states? Does the applicant demonstrate past experience and documentation recognizing and investigating foodborne disease outbreaks? Does the applicant explain how this project would integrate with other programs (e.g., FoodNet, FDA Food Protection Rapid Response Teams)? Do existing staff members have appropriate experience to accomplish the program goals? Does the plan describe how key staff not already hired will be secured? For any staff to be hired, are the position descriptions and necessary experience and background adequately described? As described, will the staff be sufficient to accomplish the program goals, including outreach to other state and/or local health jurisdictions? Does the applicant include letters of support?

Strengths:

- The applicant clearly and extensively describes the accomplishments and capacity to carry out and implement the project and program goals including funding by other mechanisms. Existing staff members have needed experience and total staffing levels appear to be sufficient to carry out project.
- The applicant also discussed how this project would integrate with other programs and partners.
- The applicant provided adequate letters of support.

Weaknesses:

The capacity narrative would have been strengthened with the inclusion of

- Additional detail regarding position descriptions with qualifications and how proposed new staff will be secured/ hired.

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Objective Review Criteria

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- C) Process Monitoring (15 points):** Overall, does the applicant propose clear and reasonable plans for monitoring proposed activities and implementation (“process” evaluation)? Does the applicant include clear and appropriate timelines, identify roles/responsibilities of project staff and adequately demonstrate that the project will be completed in the allotted time?

Strengths:

The applicant provided clear and reasonable plans for monitoring proposed activities which include deadlines and timing of reviews for benchmark measures.

The applicant provided adequate descriptions of roles/responsibilities of project staff

The proposed timeline is aggressive, but would assure that the project would be completed in the allotted time frame.

Weaknesses:

The process monitoring narrative would have been strengthened with the inclusion of

- Additional details to illustrate how ambitious timelines will be met (e.g., hiring all new staff by October 1, 2010).

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Objective Review Criteria

For each criterion, provide comments regarding the strengths and/or weaknesses for **each** proposed Activity. Please use bullets and reference your comments with page numbers whenever possible. Numeric scores (1 score for each criterion) should be placed on the first page of the evaluation form.

- D) Measures of Effectiveness (15 Points):** Does the applicant provide measures of effectiveness demonstrating the accomplishment of the project objectives identified in the “Purpose” section of this announcement such that effective “outcome” evaluation can be accomplished? Does the applicant propose clear plan(s) for:
- 1. How does the applicant propose to decrease the time to identification of foodborne disease outbreaks?** *(See pages 27-28 of the FOA for specific criteria/questions for this core area) (5 points)*
 - 2. How does the applicant propose to improve timeliness of public health response to mitigate foodborne disease outbreaks?** *(See page 28 of the FOA for specific criteria/questions for this core area) (5 points)*
 - 3. How does the applicant propose to improve collaboration between federal, state and local partners during foodborne disease outbreaks?** *(See page 29 of the FOA for specific criteria/questions for this core area) (5 points)*

Strengths:

The applicant provided well delineated measures of effectiveness for all activities. The proposal includes appropriate timelines and strong goals.

Weaknesses:

The measures of effectiveness would have been strengthened with the inclusion of

- Additional details to support the proposed goal for time to investigate clusters
- Additional details to limit uncertainty for measures of effectiveness describes as ‘in most cases’ and ‘sometimes’
- Additional details for baseline data to determine if the proposed measures and goals are attainable.

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Objective Review Criteria

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- E) Background, Understanding, and Need (5 Points):** Does the applicant demonstrate a clear and comprehensive understanding of the underlying public health issue that this project targets? Does the applicant justify the need for this program within the target community?

Strengths:

The applicant presents a clear and comprehensive understanding of the public health issue from multiple perspectives inside and outside of Massachusetts. The applicant also presents and justifies the need within the target community to make improvements.

Weaknesses:

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Objective Review Criteria

For each criterion, provide comments regarding the strengths and/or weaknesses for **each** proposed Activity.

- F) Budget (SF 424A) and Budget Narrative (*Not Scored*):** Is the amount requested appropriate for the activities proposed? Are all costs adequately justified? If the applicant requests indirect costs in the budget, a copy of the indirect cost rate agreement is required. If the indirect cost rate is a provisional rate, the agreement should be less than 12 months of age.

Strengths:

The applicant provided an clear, sufficiently detailed budget. The proposed budget is appropriate for and adequately justified.

Weaknesses:

The budget would have been strengthened with the inclusion of

- Additional details to describe the contract mechanism for data entry support staff
- Additional details regarding what staff will be traveling to the OutbreakNet Conference
- Additional details to justify that the salary for the 'Food and Drug Inspector, II' will be sufficient given the position would be a supervisory role
- Additional details to justify that the amount budgeted for transport of specimens from clinical laboratories to the PHL will be sufficient.